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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0335  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0391  
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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2381  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0419  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1052  
RUEHUM/AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR 0079  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
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RUEHVN/USMISSION USOSCE 2435  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000452

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DEPT FOR G/TIP SHEREEN FARAJ AND MEGAN HALL; SCA FOR  
JESSICA MAZZONE; DRL; INL FOR ANDREW BUHLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2018

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL KWMN KCRM OEXC EAID UZ  
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: ENCOURAGING EFFORT TO FIGHT  
TRAFFICKING, A SHREWD HOKIM, AND BITTERSWEET MEMORIES OF  
EXCHANGE PARTICIPANTS

Classified By: Political Officer Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During her March 29 - March 30 visit to Bukhara, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (A/DAS) for South and Central Asia and Public Diplomacy Pamela Spratlen held meetings with a diverse array of civil society representatives, including U.S. Government-sponsored exchange program alumni, former U.S. Peace Corps employees and volunteer counterparts, and representatives of a USAID and INL-funded anti-trafficking in persons NGO. A/DAS Spratlen also met with Bukhara Provincial Governor (Hokim) Samoidin Khusenov, the longest-serving regional official in Uzbekistan, who painted a purely rosy picture of life and political achievements in Bukhara. Khusenov also expressed his support for a proposed exchange program in which university students from Arizona would study the Uzbek language in Bukhara this summer. A key theme that emerged from the grassroots commentators was that U.S. Government-sponsored programs have had a major positive impact in enhancing civil society in Uzbekistan over the long-term, and they hoped the time would soon be right to consider expanding existing programs as well as approaching the Government of Uzbekistan about restarting a Peace Corps program. End summary.

Visit to Trafficking Victims' Shelter

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¶2. (C) A/DAS Spratlen and DCM visited a USAID-funded shelter for trafficking in persons victims in Bukhara, one of only two in the country. Director Abira Khuseynova and several associates warmly received their American guests and informed us that on March 27, the Senate had followed the lower house's (Oliy Majlis) lead and passed long-awaited trafficking in persons legislation (Note: On April 2, MFA America's Desk Chief Ismat Fayzullaev told poloff that

President Karimov was likely to sign the anti-trafficking legislation, as well as two International Labor Organization conventions on child labor, sometime over the next two weeks.  
End note.)

¶3. (C) Khuseynova, who receives political support from the local Hokim, believes the new law will demonstrate that Uzbekistan has joined the worldwide movement to address TIP in earnest. Nonetheless, she cited the need to establish more shelters around the country and to further amend the criminal code to strengthen penalties against traffickers (Comment: Although we have not seen the latest version of the TIP law, our understanding is that it will strengthen penalties against traffickers. End comment.) She said that of the victims she works with, "it is rare that Tashkent is the departure airport," which echoes the Tashkent-based NGO representatives who noted increased scrutiny from the main international gateway. She also has noticed an increase in Chinese-bound Uzbek victims, especially to Urumchi. She expects the problem will remain serious for the foreseeable future due to serious economic problems and globalization.

#### U.S. Exchange Program Alumni Value their Experiences

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¶4. (C) A/DAS Spratlen and DCM met with an enthusiastic group of U.S. exchange program alumni in Bukhara on March 29. The participants had participated in the Teachers' Exchange (TEA) program, Partners in Education (PIE), or Muskie programs. Each fondly reminisced in fluent English about how important their respective opportunities were in broadening their horizons and helping them make professional contacts with American peers. The group understood why programs had been

suspended, but said they would like to see them returned to their previous robust levels, which they believe would accelerate the development of civil society in Uzbekistan as alumni return home with fresh perspectives and renewed energy.

#### Meeting with U.S. Peace Corps Partners

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¶5. (C) On March 30, also in Bukhara, A/DAS Spratlen and DCM met with a group of five former Peace Corps employees and volunteer counterparts who had been involved with the program before its 2005 suspension due to the Government of Uzbekistan's refusal to provide visas to volunteers. The group was comprised mostly of secondary-level English teachers who spoke excellent English and worked with several generations of American volunteers. A majority had traveled to the United States in the past, which they attributed to networking with Peace Corps volunteers that helped them identify available U.S.-sponsored exchange programs, prepare resumes, strengthen interview skills, and use the Internet.

¶6. (C) The group was unanimous in the belief Peace Corps Volunteers made a substantial impact in developing the skills of countless teachers and students alike and expressed eagerness for the program to restart. One teacher described how interaction with a Peace Corps Volunteer helped her to participate in a U.S.-sponsored exchange program, which she subsequently used to build a lasting partnership with an American high school teacher she met during that program. Another recalled how a returned Peace Corps volunteer had assisted her in setting up a puppet theater in Bukhara, now a thriving commercial tourist attraction. None were shy about stating that school administrators and Ministry of Education officials firmly support the return of Peace Corps volunteers, but that "other political forces" need to be overcome. All yearned for Peace Corps to return to Uzbekistan. Their advice if we ever negotiate the return of Peace Corps was to thoroughly brief senior political leaders on the Peace Corps program.

#### Meeting with Hokim of Bukhara

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¶ 7. (C) On March 29 visiting A/DAS and DCM met with the Hokim (Governor) of Bukhara Province Samoidin Khusenov. Appointed in 1996, he is the longest-serving Hokim in Uzbekistan, and after a few minutes of conversation it was easy to see why. Khusenov delivered a well-rehearsed talk in which he enthusiastically promoted the "great resources" and "enormous potential" of Bukhara province and the "outstanding achievements" of President Karimov "in developing all economic roads" according to market economic principles. He insisted that socio-economic conditions in Bukhara are "constantly improving and strengthening." Khusenov added that given Karimov's strong emphasis on educating the youth, "the next generation will be even better." The Internet, he continued without guile, "is everywhere, even in houses, where it's not just only on one computer but multiple computers." (Comment: Earlier the same day, Poloff observed the departure of an outbound Samara Airlines flight taking Uzbek workers to Russia as a mostly female crowd of relatives waved sadly at the jet as it lifted off the runway. This scene contradicts Khusenov's rosy appraisal of life in Bukhara. End comment.)

¶ 8. (C) Khusenov was clearly annoyed when A/DAS Spratlen and DCM interrupted his chamber of commerce speech to raise the issue of multiple-drug resistant tuberculosis. Khusenov

retorted that rates of tuberculosis are going down "as a result of state programs that deal with it." In response to a reference to a recent New York Times article describing the high rates of multiple drug-resistant strains in Central Asia, he conceded that "these facts do have a place," and expressed support for USAID and other anti-tuberculosis projects; however, he sharply concluded that "it is simply incorrect to speak of big numbers of cases." He stated procedures were in place to track and treat prisoners with TB. Likewise, when asked about civil society, Khusenov curtly noted that "it is very developed here and there are no problems."

¶ 9. (SBU) After Khusenov described efforts to nurture youth and noted that "we are open to all sides who want to cooperate," DCM and A/DAS Spratlen briefed him about a proposed cultural exchange program in which 20 Arizona State University students would study the Uzbek language at Bukhara State University this summer. He vigorously nodded in agreement at the goals of the program and responded that he supports the idea. (Comment: The expressed support of the Hokim should make it easier to obtain approval for the project through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. End comment.)

Comment:

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¶ 10. (C) Over the course of A/DAS Spratlen's meetings with a diverse array of human rights and civil society practitioners in Uzbekistan, one message was loud and clear: U.S. Government-sponsored programs, including the Embassy's Democracy Commission grants and its diverse slate of exchange programs, have had a positive impact in enhancing civil society and human rights in Uzbekistan. All of the interlocutors agreed that funding for such programs should be increased in order to encourage more sustainable improvement over the long term. A/DAS Spratlen's meeting with former Peace Corps employees and counterparts also highlighted the many positive contributions that American volunteers had made in their host communities before the program was suspended in ¶ 2005. Though it is far too soon now, we will have civil society support should the time come to approach the government about restarting the Peace Corps program in Uzbekistan. Even the Hokim, a shrewd survivor, will take advantage of U.S.-supported initiatives if he believes it is in his interest.

¶ 11. (U) This message has been cleared by A/DAS Spratlen.  
NORLAND